

Something to Talk About

by Ckelst

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Summary: What if Hiccup had actually tried to talk to his father in the back room of the forge? Would it have made any difference?

Whether it did or not, it's still interesting to think about. Rated K-plus; the language is all K. One-off.

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A/N

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This is just a little one-off that sprang from one of those "would a small change in part of the story have huge implications later?" thoughts. I seem to have lots of those; "I Won This Thing," "Did Anybody See That?" and "Heather Together" all sprang from similar thoughts. This probably isn't my best writing, but I present it to you anyway, so you'll have something to read over the Memorial Day weekend (in the USA) and to appease your need for dragons until the second movie comes out._

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"With you doing so well in the ring... we finally have something to talk about." Stoick scooted his stool closer to Hiccup and stared at him with an eager expression that Hiccup had never seen before. His father actually wanted to hear what he had to say!

What in the Nine Worlds should he say?

He had been taken totally off guard when his father burst in on him in his back room in the forge; he'd had to scramble to hide all his drawings of Night Furies and artificial dragon tails. Then he'd been

thrown even further for a loop when his dad had implied that he knew all about Toothless. And now this! He had yet to score a single hit on a dragon in the training ring, and yet he had become the front-runner in the training competition. He still had nothing in common with his father. But this was a moment he'd dreamed of all his life – a father-son bonding moment. He had to say something, and he had to say it quickly, or this moment would pass and probably never happen again. He tried to think fast, in spite of his mental fog.

"Well, Dad... fighting dragons is a lot more complicated than I thought it would be."

"Oh?" Stoick was obviously puzzled. "How so?"

"Before I started, I thought it was just, 'see a dragon, hit a dragon, kill a dragon.' " Stoick nodded in approval at such a simple, direct approach to the problem. "But now that I'm actually learning how to do it, there's a lot more to it than that." Hiccup's half-formed idea was taking shape as he spoke.

"Take the Gronckle, for instance. That thing is totally predictable! I almost don't need a shield when I fight it; I just watch it shoot fire at somebody, count to eight, and if I'm the closest one to it, I duck so its next shot will miss. It's no threat at all. The Hideous Zippleback is supposed to be tricky, but as long as it's in the ring, there are only so many tricks it can play. I'm not afraid of that one, either." Stoick was continuing to nod.

"But the Deadly Nadder... Dad, that dragon gives me fits! Whenever I see it, I never know if it's going to use fire, or tail spines, or just claws and teeth. I never can guess if it's going to fly at me, or run at me, or turn and chase someone else. As soon as I think I've got it figured out, it tries something new. I would so like to rearrange that thing's face... and yet, I look forward to meeting it, just because I know it's going to challenge me." He omitted the part about meeting that challenge by knocking the dragon out with a chin rub.

"I guess what I'm asking is, did you ever meet a dragon that you almost hated to kill, because it was such a worthy opponent?"

Stoick looked thoughtful for a few seconds. "Yes. I did meet a dragon like that. Once.

"It was right after my father died. I was next in line to be chief, but there were a few other warriors in town who thought they deserved the position more than I did. When the dragons came, I knew if I killed one more of them, that would prove my worthiness, and I could become chief without having to fight any duels or win any contests. I was all over the town, looking for a dragon to fight... but every one I saw either flew away or was already dead. I was getting frustrated.

"Then I caught sight of a big Deadly Nadder, a dark-blue one, near the fish-drying racks. Someone had tangled its wings with a bola so it couldn't fly. It had used up all its juice and fired all its spines, so teeth and claws were all it had left. I'd thrown away my shield – a Monstrous Nightmare had set it on fire in a fly-by attack – so all I had was my hammer. But I wasn't afraid. I wanted

that dragon!

"Back and forth we went. I'd swing, and it would dodge; it would lunge and I'd duck, or swing to make it back off. Other Vikings saw us fighting and ran up to help, but I warned them off. 'This one is mine!' I shouted, and they respected that.

"It kicked at me. It tried to trip me with its tail. It tried to overrun me. It put some moves on me that I'd never faced before. It even faked a fire attack with no fire, to force me off balance. I jumped, I dodged, I aimed high, I aimed low, I tried left-handed attacks... I tried everything. Before too long, it wasn't about me becoming chief, or about protecting the village. It was personal! I'd never fought a dragon like that, and I don't think it had ever fought a man like me. Neither of us would give up. It was fighting for its life, and I was fighting... out of pure Viking stubbornness, I suppose.

"We must have gone back and forth for half an hour or more. The sweat was pouring off of me; its breath was like a hot wind blowing out of your forge. I'm not sure if either of us was still strong enough to knock the other one down. Finally, one of the other Vikings got tired of waiting, and threw a spear. It got the dragon right between the ribs, and the fight was over. But as that Nadder breathed its last, it wasn't looking at the man who killed it. It was looking at me, and I think I actually knew what it was thinking. It was thinking, 'We should have finished this, just you and me.'

"I've fought hundreds of dragons since then, and I've killed dozens of them. But the one I remember best was the one I didn't get to kill. And it's interesting that it was a Deadly Nadder, just like your nemesis." Stoick stroked his beard. "Maybe our destinies are linked, son. Maybe this is a sign that you're destined to be a chief and a dragon slayer, like your father before you. What do you think of that?"

This was a lot more than Hiccup had expected when he'd opened up the conversation. "Wow, Dad. That's intense." Him, a chief? It might happen, if a lot of unlikely circumstances worked just right. Him, a dragon slayer? Not a chance! He'd had a chance to kill a Night Fury, and had failed so badly that the Night Fury was now his best friend.

The conversation petered out. His dad presented him with a helmet, "to keep you safe in the ring," and they'd gone their separate ways shortly after that.

The next day, as he waited in the entrance to the training ring, he could hear his father making his humiliating speech while the rest of the town laughed. He couldn't get last night's conversation out of his mind. To his father, that Nadder was just a trophy that he didn't get to hang on his wall. To Hiccup, it was an intelligent being with feelings and hopes and wishes. Trapped, it had wanted nothing more than the chance to die with dignity, and even that had been taken away from it. Now he stood in his father's place, preparing to face another dragon that could not escape. His father's fondest hope was that Hiccup would kill it and prove his worthiness, just as his father had tried to prove his worthiness to be chief. Just another trophy.

I'm going to put an end to this, he decided. _I have to
try_.

****The End****

End
file.